

# Untold Italy Episode 63 - Special Gifts from Tuscany

[00:00:00.060] - Katy

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 62.

[00:00:11.840] - Josie

Ciao and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, I'm Josie.

[00:00:14.960] - Katy

And I'm Katy, and we're here to help you plan your trip to Italy.

[00:00:18.800] - Josie

Between us, we have many years of travel experience and we want to help you uncover your own as yet untold stories and adventures in Italy.

[00:00:26.850] - Katy

Each episode, you'll hear practical advice, tips and ideas to help you plan your own trips to the magical land of history, stunning landscapes and a whole lot of pasta.

[00:00:35.690] - Josie

We'll have interviews from experts and focus on local destinations and frequently asked questions about travel in Italy.

[00:00:42.800] - Katy

Thanks for listening and make sure to subscribe to our show.

[00:00:45.890] - Josie

Now let's get started on your regular dose of Bella Italia.

[00:01:00.290] - Katy

Ciao Tutti! Hi, everyone. Hope you're all keeping well, I'm here with you for another week of a virtual escape to Italy as it's the start of March at the time of recording. I know those of you in the Northern Hemisphere are starting to see the first sprouts of spring. This is a time of hope and renewal and as it's been a very tough winter for you all, let's hope that spring brings some good news and some more certainty around when we can travel.

[00:01:28.790] - Katy

But in the meantime, we keep dreaming, right? So today I wanted to talk to you about one of the many travel questions that we get via email and on our Facebook group and one that pops up quite a lot is what souvenirs or gifts we should bring back home from our trip to Italy. Now, while some people like to collect magnets or badges, I actually love to buy locally made

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

goods. These are the ones that have become, you know, they have their own history and background. And when you bring them into your home, they become part of the fabric of your own family stories. The things like linens and perfumes and handmade cosmetics and soaps and they're all very beautiful and local and unique to the areas that you visit. Today, we are heading back to Tuscany and the Chianti region to chat with my friend Arianna from KM Zero Tours about the souvenirs and gifts available in her region that have been created and made by people who have developed their craft - often over many generations. You'll find these handicrafts and products when you visit. Beautiful Chianti and Arianna's also going to tell us how you can find them and bring them into your own home while we wait for travel to reopen.

[00:02:42.580] - Katy

Benvenuto! Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast, Arianna.

[00:02:47.290] - Arianna

Thanks so much, Katy, and thanks so much for letting me be here another time.

[00:02:53.680] - Katy

Oh, you're always welcome. So, Arianna, before we get started, talking about some of the amazing artisan made products of Tuscany, can you just paint a picture for us of how things are in your beautiful Chianti region right now? Are you beginning to see the signs of spring?

[00:03:10.360] - Arianna

Yeah, it's a very special time here. And we're having some beautiful days. We're having some lovely walks every day. Every day there is a new plant which is starting to bloom. And you have this crispy fresh air and the sunshine and, you know, that pleasant sunshine that you wish to stay outdoors and we are having the first lunch outside. The almonds are already in bloom. So you and the birds started to sing. I really I right now I can hear the sound of the birds singing all around. So it's a beautiful time of the year because it's still fresh, but the first spring colors are coming out. So we start to see all the wisteria, which is starting to bloom and poppies will be blooming very soon. So we are very excited about this time of year. I think we all need a little bit of joy and the colors, let's say, in these times.

[00:04:06.020] - Katy

Absolutely. Well, did you know that I am absolutely love wisteria, so I have wisteria hysteria? I think they call it, but I love, I love those bright purple colors and the poppies and Arianna actually sent me a picture of the poppies, and I couldn't believe it. I was so excited to see them. And so if you pop on over to I think it's your Instagram, isn't it? We have to say that if you want to get a bit of springtime hope from Tuscany, it's beautiful.

[00:04:37.130] - Arianna

Yeah, it's very beautiful. Wisteria is incredible. And the poppies too and also we have these very traditional flowers - the name is Irises and it is the flowers of Florence - the lily are very,

very beautiful. We'll talk about that maybe in a little bit. But it's every single flower has this special color and smells - it's fabulous.

[00:05:01.460] - Katy

I can't wait to see it. And it's great to bring such a really great time for hope, isn't it? With all these things sprouting? I think it's fabulous. And we all need a bit of that right now I think.

[00:05:09.950] - Arianna

Yeah absolutely, absolutely.

[00:05:13.520] - Katy

Oh Arianna in our show introduction I mentioned that I'm often asked what souvenirs people should bring home from their trip to Italy, and I always recommend that they buy artisan made local goods. But do you know what - that's becoming kind of like a generic general statement, so I really wanted to talk to you about what we mean by artisan made goods. What do you think that means to you?

[00:05:37.370] - Arianna

So it is important artisans goods are not only something to buy, but most importantly, they become memories. So the beautiful thing is that, first of all, we have the feeling, the strong feeling that you are helping a project. And in my opinion, this is the sense of commitment and the rewarding of doing something you like at first because you're buying something for yourself or for your loved ones, but also you're helping somebody else, which in this moment, it is a wonderful feeling because I think the feeling of supporting each other, it makes you just feel better and also want to go back home and you wear that item or you eat that product, you will remember the people you met and the experience you had and the project you supported. And so it has a totally different meaning. And I think this sense of appreciation is what makes you then remember that they and that experience and the people forever. And also for the people who are receiving that product in case this is not a product for you, but it is for your friends. Again, you're not just giving them something, you are where you are inviting them to you to get into somebody's life and you're letting them be part of a project. And the reason that and I think it just makes people feel more - even more happy to receive that special item. So, yeah. And then also here, especially here in Italy, everywhere you go, you have a specific tradition and every time of the year is different and it makes it even more special. So it's not just about that specific project, but then it's the specific project within that specific town tradition and within that specific time of the year. So it makes it even more special.

[00:07:28.700] - Katy

Even further, I think some of these traditions have been passed down from generation to generation so they can be hundreds of years old. So it's even the connection that you have back to the place that you visited and the memories will be even stronger.

[00:07:43.730] - Arianna

Absolutely. So we always support from the beginning. Let's say, from the beginning of our project, we always supported the food and handicraft products made by families with the love and with the passion and all these people who have stories to tell. And they basically transmit these stories into the products.

[00:08:05.150] - Katy

Oh, wonderful. So maybe you can tell us a little bit about some of the special products from your area. I know there's some amazing pottery in your part of Tuscany. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

[00:08:17.060] - Arianna

Yeah, so pottery is a big tradition. We have different traditions of pottery. We have the pottery for outdoors, for the gardens, and that is the terracotta from Impruneta. But also we have some pottery, so that the painted pottery and we know these two ladies, Cinzia and Monica and they give in Certaldo is a beautiful, beautiful hilltop town. We talked about Certaldo on the previous podcast. It's a hilltop, medieval town, very beautiful. And they have their workshop there. They did that art for, you know, forever and they are excellent in that. They just love to, usually on a normal season to welcome visitors and to share their talents. They also have run classes that usually. Of course, this is not possible right now, but we wanted to support them in any case and to try to do our best to share their talent with our friends who are located a little bit everywhere in the world.

[00:09:20.300] - Katy

And so what sort of items do they make?

[00:09:22.530] - Arianna

So they make many different things, which are all adorable. I couldn't resist. From the olive oil bottles to ladle rests so something which is, let's say, beautiful, but also useful for the kitchen. And they hand paint all these items by hand and they have the beautiful Tuscan design - so you know the cypress and the poppies and the views of the olives. It's wonderful. So, again, once you buy one of the items, then it's like having a little piece of Tuscany with you and it's very beautiful.

[00:10:02.900] - Katy

I could just see it sitting on my kitchen bench top - like an olive oil bottle. And just every time I'm making a little bit of sauce, I can go for, you know, how beautiful. And and these ladies been doing this for a very long time.

[00:10:16.340] - Arianna

Yeah, yeah. It's it's been like 30 years. They have that place in Certaldo, so it's their whole life.

[00:10:25.370] - Katy

Oh, beautiful. And so not just the pottery, but there's also linens from Tuscany as well. Very special, beautifully made linens too. Where you find those?

[00:10:37.250] - Arianna

So in Chianti, something again which is beautiful and useful at the same time. So kitchen towels and breadbaskets, you know, all those things that, again, with the beautiful designs of Tuscany, with the Roosters, with the little roosters or with the poppies and sun flowers, they're made here by some artisans, again. In this case, it's been in their family for many generations. So it's very beautiful. Let's say once once you go there, you really understand the whole process. And it's a very beautiful experience.

[00:11:08.300] - Katy

And do they make tablecloths and napkins and things like that?

[00:11:12.620] - Arianna

Yes, everything from the kitchen, for the kitchen. So you go there and you have so many different products and you just need to choose.

[00:11:23.120] - Katy

So that's the bit that I find hard. But I can imagine that if you get this tablecloth out and you make a beautiful meal for your family, once again, that memory of Tuscany's coming back through. So, yeah, I don't think you can underestimate the power of something beautiful like that to really give you that emotional connection back to Tuscany.

[00:11:47.000] - Arianna

Yeah, absolutely. Also because the part of enjoying a meal is very important for Italian families. So it's important to have wonderful foods. And we may talk about that also in a minute. But also to be able to make your table beautiful is a very important part for our culture. So to have care of the place where you enjoy your meal, so to have beautiful things which surrounds you, it helps, it helps then you to appreciate even more that meal and that moment with your family and loved ones.

[00:12:25.490] - Katy

Absolutely. I can picture the scene now. This is this idea that I have in my head - when I finally get back to easily - is these huge long table and a lovely, beautiful white linen tablecloth and just a beautiful lunch with friends and.. oh, I can't wait. So if you have to have lunch, you have to have food right? So Arianna has promise to tell me all about the special food products that you can get from the Chianti region as well, that you can bring home with you. So you probably should talk about olive oil first huh?

[00:13:02.540] - Arianna

Yeah, olive oil is a big must. The olive oil is always on our tables. We use olive oil for everything from the appetizer, first courses, second courses and even dessert. So we cannot

live without the olive oil. So olive oil, absolutely. And again, we selected olive oils from very small, little farms, organic and which are very close to us. So they're dear friends - young and with passion and with a very good vision about producing high quality extra virgin olive oil. But also, again, as it is right now, actually - our concepts about creating these gift boxes, it was about following a little bit the seasonality. So we have followed two main approaches. One was to support the artisans in a real way, in the sense that to really select the people who are investing their love and time and innovation there put I don't know if you have the same expression in English - to put their faces on the products' in the sense that to really put everything their whole life in that product and also the other main thing we wanted to support it was the seasonality, because every season is special on its own. And so to give value, let's say, to all the seasonal products, and that had to be the ones who received the box to better understand the Tuscan culture, in every season. And so, of course, right now there's the Spring, so we can wait to taste all the products we have in spring right now.

[00:14:40.820] - Katy

Oh, goodness, so Tuscan olive oil. Now everyone I speak to all over Italy says the olive oil is the best. Well, I'm sure it is. But is there something that's different about the olive oil in Tuscany to other regions?

[00:14:57.440] - Arianna

Yeah, it is absolutely different for two main reasons. The first one is the varieties of olive trees. So every region has different varieties, just like the vineyard. So you have Sangiovese, Merlot, Cabernet and the same thing can be said about olive trees. So there's Frantoio, Leccino and Pendolino and Moraiolo, you know, those are all varieties from Tuscany, which, of course, have a very specific taste, and they give the specialities to our olive oil. So that's the first reason why our olive oil is unique, because it is made of Tuscan varieties which are not present elsewhere except for Tuscany. The other reason is that the way we harvest is a little different from other regions because we harvest olives when the olives change their color from green to black, because like every other fruit, the olives at the beginning, they are green when they are ripe, and then they change the color and they turn to black when they are ripe. In some mostly in the south of Italy, they tend to harvest when the olives are all turning black. And so the olive oil will be milder, the fruits are ripe. We have a different, different tradition. We harvest them when they change the color, so some of our olives in the basket would be green. So very peppery, green and fresh, and some others would be half green and half black. And then there will be some others which are totally black. So a case full of olives in Tuscany, you have different colors. And then the olive oil will be a mix of all these different states of ripeness. And so this gives us especially the green olives, the very peppery and spice and green taste, very rich in the flavors. And this is something which you don't find in other parts of Italy.

[00:16:55.870] - Katy

Arianna, you've just blown my mind, I guess, like logically, I probably knew that there was different types of trees and different varieties, but I think I hadn't really thought about it that much. And I've never really understood that whole process. That's a really interesting insight

into olive oil, because I've always been sort of perplexed that everyone thinking their live oil is the best. But I mean, I guess what they saying is that the best that they can make with their varieties and the terrain that they've got in the area. Amazing.

[00:17:29.320] - Arianna

Yeah. Then I must say that in any case, then, if you're here in Chianti and you go from one town to the other, each one of them will say that their olive oil is the best! In that case, there is no excuses because it's the same variety, the same kind of thing. But I can explain a little part of it then the rest is just the family proud and that - it cannot be explained in any way.

[00:17:57.880] - Katy

Ah - it's a little bit of magic.

[00:17:59.050] - Arianna

Yeah. Absolutely.

[00:18:00.760] - Katy

Oh, I love it. That's so fascinating. Oh, I'm really glad we talked about that. OK. All right. So not just olive oil, but also I can imagine with all those beautiful flowers everywhere that the bees make some delicious honey. Tell us about the honey from Tuscany.

[00:18:18.040] - Arianna

So, yeah. So the honey is another big product we have all the year round, but especially, of course, in the spring as of the bees, of course, they get their food from the flowers. So the more flowers, the more food. And so especially the more varieties of different foods for the bees. So yeah. So we collaborate with this wonderful beekeeper. He does everything organic. He does such passionate work. He is since long time generation in his farm. And it's a beautiful thing about him is the different varieties of honeys he makes. It is incredible. So we think of honey as something we would stir with tea, but in the end, there are so many things you can do with the honey. So that leads me actually to another big product which we love. We love to pair honey with Pecorino - one of the best combinations. And that is something that some people don't think - they think of honey more for the tea or for breakfast, but it can be used also during your meal. We also use it with a yogurt. We use it, we use it in many different, in many different ways. And of course, there are different kind of honeys according to what you want to eat. So you can you can really explore and keep discovering new ways to use and to appreciate the honey.

[00:19:44.560] - Katy

Aw delicious. I can just do a wedge of pecorino cheese with some drizzle of honey - that would be delicious. Because Pecorino again, I think last time we were talking about, you know, there aren't so many cattle in Tuscany, right. So you have mainly sheep. And so obviously pecorino is a sheep's milk cheese. I think that's really fascinating as well. And it's actually probably good for people that have got lactose intolerance, right?

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

[00:20:11.110] - Arianna

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So there's the cattle - the cow milk is the more rich. Then let's say the sheep milk is that less. And then there is also the goat milk which is even less. So it's let's say it's different. We have in Tuscany we have both the traditional sheep and goats milk and we love both. Especially this time of the year, like the spring time of the year the milk is exceptional because it's fresh. And again, it really depends on what the animals eat. So during the fall and the summer, they will eat more the dry, the hay and all these things. So then the milk would be more rich. Now there is the fresh grass and they can go out to pasture. So they move and they exercise and they can they can eat so many different - again, the flowers is something that the animals eat too. And then all this variety of complexity, you get back to the milk - so in the end, the Pecorino and the now Caprino is exceptional because it's really one of the best times to appreciate those products.

[00:21:22.000] - Katy

OK And so how long do they age this pecorino cheese in your part of the world?

[00:21:26.290] - Arianna

So it can be, there is three main products. One is the fresh, which is the fresco which can be just a couple weeks aged old. And then there is the semi- stagionato which is from one month to a couple of months of ages. And then there is this stagionato so we can go from three months up to one year. It depends. But there is a big tradition actually, also, because the thing is aging cheese, it's also a good way for farmers to be able to send something also during winter, because in the winter, there is no milk production because the goats and sheep are pregnant. They are giving birth to the first babies. Now, let's say they started mid February and they will go on until, let's say then the spring. And so now it's their delivery time. But let's say before during the winter, they are pregnant and they don't produce anything. And so for the farmers, for the cheese makers, having aged cheese is a way to be able to to have always, at least something available to survive all through the winter times. So it is very important.

[00:22:35.900] - Katy

Absolutely, so probably only ever had an aged pecorino, never had a fresh one, I'd be really interested to try one, actually. Delicious.

[00:22:45.900] - Arianna

Yeah, again, the fresh one, you cannot find the fresh one in the winter because there's no - again, it's a very seasonal seasonal product. There is one, let's say one very famous Pecorino fresco, the most famous one, it's called Marzolino because of March, because if you want to have the fresh milk and so Marzolino, because the March cheese. See, you just to say that it's one of the first before you can enjoy during the season.

[00:23:21.500] - Katy

Amazing. Well, I have to say, especially if you're in the UK or the US (and even Australia, I think, depending on the type of cheese) you can actually bring, you might not think, but you can actually bring cheese home and you can have it - they will vacuum pack it for you won't they?

[00:23:38.460] - Arianna

Yeah.

[00:23:38.870] - Katy

And I didn't notice until very late in my adventures in Italy. And then I found out and I used to have like half a suitcase full of cheese and meats and things because they would just vacuum it and it really keeps it fine for taking back to your home country, it's amazing.

[00:23:56.960] - Arianna

Yeah, absolutely. Something funny about the name Pecorino, but I'm sure that some of you already know - comes from the word 'pecore'. So it's basically a pecore means sheep in Italian. So Pecorino is basically the sheep milk. It comes from the word pecore so the pecorino and then Caprino, the good milk is from Capra, which is the goat. So the name of the animal is the name of the cheese.

[00:24:26.720] - Katy

Yeah, that makes sense. I like it when things make sense. Oh you were telling me you're going to be making a frittata later and I'm wondering if these vegetables are going to be your fritatta because it's a really delicious spring vegetables coming up at the moment with asparagus and artichokes.

[00:24:43.970] - Arianna

And now it's the time when it's all about asparagus and an artichokes here in the countryside. So it's fun because we have actually ,we are in the countryside and the wild asparagus does just grown in our woods - so we can go and harvest and you don't need any license or any - you just go and you keep finding this wild asparagus. And then what we do usually - as they are many and all at the same time, we go harvest them a lot and then either we freeze them for the winter or then we cook them in many different ways. And then we create some jars and some we can eat some cream of asparagus or other things that then we can keep for a longer time. Because asparagus are incredible and artichokes as well. Also, we can do so many things. We've got from the risotto to the fritata, pasta. It's such flexible products that you can create so many recipes with them.

[00:25:50.820] - Katy

Asparagus is my second favorite vegetable, the eggplant. I love it, I love it so much. But it's one of those crazy plants, isn't it? Because as soon as you cut it off, it basically starts growing again doesn't it? And it grows really fast.

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

[00:26:06.740] - Arianna

Yeah. I don't know if you've ever seen them. Here is plenty. There is one that's kind of the mother of the asparagus which is Asparagina. But it's funny because they always grow together, they love olive trees. They usually grow - that's why here is plenty. They usually grow - always when you see a trunk, either they love the oak trees and the olive trees and always on the bottom of the trunk there is these Asparagina, which is the mother. Then always next to it, you see the Asparagus. You don't want to extract the roots. You just want to cut them in a way that the lower part will stay in the ground. And then you go back in two days and you see another Asparagus that is ready. And so it's really good fun. And we always have a big competition because we both Alessio and I love to go. And of course, it's a big competition about who gets more! The thing is that we walk one next to the other one. So of course we see the same asparagus and we rush - one first then then the other one. But it's really good. It's really good fun.

[00:27:26.250] - Katy

It sounds like it. Oh forget truffle hunting, let's go asparagus hunting, next time!

[00:27:30.360] - Arianna

It's very, very similar because it's fun. And and then also it is fresh. Wonderful days, it's very pleasant. And then you can do picnics because it's the first day, the first days when we can enjoy lunch outside. So it's fun because you can just bring a blanket and then just find a beautiful spot, beautiful garden. You know something else, which is very typical from this time of the years is the fava beans. We just love to eat them raw together with Pecorino. We just buy the or grow the fava beans and then we we clean them and then we we eat them raw together like a snack together with Pecorino.

[00:28:12.120] - Katy

Can you also pickle those fava beans, do they pickle them?

[00:28:15.430] - Arianna

Yeah, well we in Tuscany, we eat them raw, we just don't cook them. It's something really for our picnic. We just get them. They have like a shell.

[00:28:27.090] - Katy

Yeah.

[00:28:27.420] - Arianna

They come in a shell and so we, we just bring those and then we clean them from the shell and then we eat them just like that. Just like a snack. In the south of Italy and like in Sicily. I've been there and I've seen that they they enjoy them in a totally different way. They dry them and then they make like soups. Yeah. So that's the same product. But actually it even changes the color because when they're fresh they're like the peas, they are green. They have a very light green. But then if you dry them, they become brown. So it's even a different

color. I wouldn't expect that that's the beauty of traveling because every region has its own traditions.

[00:29:11.820] - Katy

Oh, my goodness. When I'm coming. Forget half the suitcase. I'm just gonna have to have a whole separate suitcase just for things, I think. OK, so we've done all these beautiful savory things. What about sweet things we did talk about honey but there's some sweet traditions that you have in Tuscany too.

[00:29:31.890] - Arianna

So this time of the year, you know, it's the beginning of spring and also in almost a month, a little more than a month, it will be Easter. And so this time of the year, we enjoy this very seasonal cake, which is a spring. Let's say Spring/Easter cake, which is called the Colomba. I don't know if you ever heard of it, but it's a big traditional cake that we have here.

[00:29:57.900] - Katy

Is it a bit like panetone that you have at Christmas time? Is it sort of similar to that?

[00:30:02.520] - Arianna

Yeah. It is a similar kind of dough and a similar concept - different shape which is why it's called Colomba. Colomba in Italian means the dove bird, because it really has the same shape of the dove and it is very delicious cake. It has eggs, sugar, butter and then there is almonds and it is, let's say, cake, which I would say every single Italian enjoys from now until the end of spring. It's delicious.

[00:30:33.990] - Katy

And what about the almonds? Because you make things out of the almonds as well, don't you?

[00:30:38.100] - Arianna

Yeah. So I am from Tuscany and Alessio's from Abruzzo and again, as we were saying, every single region has its own traditions. So we slowly, to introduce a little bit of an Abruzzo twist to our life. Abruzzo I must say that is a very fascinating region as well. They have lots of traditions. It's really unspoiled. There is so much to discover even for us Italians and one of the traditions they have there. It was so fascinating to me that we decided to introduce that to our Tuscan Products. And this very fascinating tradition is the confetti. I don't know if you've ever heard of these confetti. They are like sugar almonds. I don't know how exactly to describe them. But let's say it's a tradition which is very old from Sulmona, my husband, Alessio is from Anversa degli Abruzzi, which is a tiny little mountain village 30 minutes drive from Sulmona. Sulmona is this very beautiful town in Abruzzo and it is famous for its confetti. There is one factory, Pelino, which is one of the most historical factories of - it's a family affair and is artisan and everything. And it's a tradition for decades. So in Abruzzo and particular in Sulmona they do something very beautiful because, confetti, let's say are very famous all over Italy, especially for weddings or communions or anniversaries for these kind of celebrations. But in Abruzzo it's different because they - of course, they use them for these

kind of occasions - but it's more like for the joy of every day. So it's a very different meaning. And especially in the spring, they have this tradition of creating edible flowers made of these confetti. So basically each petal is a confetto and then it creates these fabulous flowers which are edible. And and when you go to visit some friends.. (you know in Tuscany, we would bring a bottle of wine ) and in Abruzzo they bring a bouquet of these edible flowers as a way to thank them for the hospitality. And it brings joy, brings colors and then they can be kept for a long time. So you don't need to eat them straight away so you can use them to decorate the house for a little bit. And then one, every time you want to have you have a bite.

[00:33:13.950] - Katy

Yum. I love sugared almonds. They're so - you know when you get that really crispy sugary outside, then you bite in and you get the nut delicious. I don't blame you for importing those. I think they are definitely from Tuscany. Definitely. Oh, well, so we always talk about a lot of food, but there are some other products that might be a little bit easier to transport around as well. And they're actually cosmetics and soaps.

[00:33:43.520] - Arianna

Yeah. So that is again, as we are celebrating spring right now and as I mentioned before at the very beginning of this conversation about these irises. It's this beautiful flower, it's lilly flowers, which actually, thanks to them, there is also the Festival of Florence. That is irises - the 'giaggiolo' in the Tuscan dialect we call them. So they bloom actually very soon. It will be end of April, the blooming of these beautiful flowers. But the interesting thing is that we are actually grow them not because of the flowers, but we grow them because of their roots. So it's a tradition we have since the Middle Ages here in Tuscany. And it was used to be more important than the wine. As a business as a way of income.

[00:34:36.740] - Arianna

And back in time, the thing is what farmers were doing, they were growing these irises. They have to grow for three years. And then at the third year, you harvest them, you cut, let's say they have like a bulb in the bottom, you cut the plant, you collect the flowers, which are in the houses and everything. But then you save the roots, you peel them, so you clean them and then you let them dry under the sun. And then once they are completely dry, you mash them and you'll get like a dust, like a powder, which inside contained an incense, which is used for cosmetics and perfumery. In the past that we used to sell all these powder to France and they were making perfumes like the old Chanel and these huge chains they used to buy in huge quantities the bulbs of our Tuscan irises to create their perfumes. Then in the 80s, 90s, there was invented a chemical like, synthetic substitute to these natural fragrance, which was, of course, cheaper, and also which could be repeated in the exact same way. So it was what they were looking for. They are big brands. They want to have the exact same product every time. So for them, the artisanality, it didn't work. And so they switched into the synthetic one. And so we lost a lot of our income as a region because we have lost so many clients around the world because, of course, they all switch to the synthetic. Now, so many people have developed allergies to these synthetic perfumes or whatever. And so our

new generations, we are slowly going back to what is artisanal. So we are ready to spend a little bit more money to have something which is organic, which is have nothing synthetic or artificial inside. And so finally, in the recent years, we are going back to what it was, our tradition, centuries old, and we start to create our own cosmetics. Finally, made in Chianti. This is such a great reward thing because until now we were only the farmers. We could not arrive until the final product. Now, instead, finally, small little places slowly start to take to create the cosmetics following the tradition with the Iris. And we know a friend of all of ours, she lives close to us. She is wonderful. She's a wonderful artist. She makes beautiful baskets. She weaves baskets too, and then she has these beautiful irises fields, and she collects the irises herself. And then in collaboration with a small laboratory she makes these cosmetics, which are organic and natural. And they are wonderful because, again, you can really feel that they are totally natural. And so that is that is a wonderful tradition and also the cashmere soap is a little bit the same concept. We have a friend of ours who has wonderful cashmere goats and she doesn't really use them for the milk, in the sense that she doesn't produce any cheese from these goats. Of course, use the goats for the hair, not really for the milk, but a little quantity of milk she decided to use for, again, making these cosmetics and they are natural. She makes these soaps made of the milk of the cashmere goats. And they are again, if you are allergic to any part, there is no perfume, there's no synthetic products. So they are, let's say, a hundred percent natural and good for the skin, let's say. And again, there are part of beautiful projects.

[00:38:47.690] - Katy

Wow. I just love this story about the Irises and of course, I love baby goats, anything to do with it. It's famous now that I love goats, but the Iris story that's so fascinating. And, you know, there is a really strong tradition of perfumes in Tuscany from hundreds of years. And I actually went to the pharmacy in Santa Maria Novella because I wanted a beautiful perfume to remind me of my time there, but to actually be able to buy products that are really from that exact area where they have gone through that really delicate process of harvesting and then creating the powder and going to the next step. That's amazing. I'd love to see that. Beautiful. Wow. Arianna, I'm going to have to buy a bigger suitcase. But, you know, unfortunately, like everyone else, I can't be Italy right now. But what you've done, and I think this is amazing, is you've managed to find a lovely way to bring your part of Tuscany the Chianti region and the gorgeous, artisanal wares of the people that you've described just now, to people all over the world. And how are you doing that?

[00:40:01.640] - Arianna

So we started a few months ago actually, so it is a very new project. And it's fun that actually we have been talking with you since the very beginning. So you're really following every single step and it's really like a baby born and we are very, very excited about it. So we started to think this Winter and Fall about how we could find a way to support and to promote Tuscany in these difficult times and to have to create a way to stay in touch with our friends all over the world and also to support our friends and producers here who are struggling in these months. And so we came up with this idea to build some gift boxes. And the whole concept is about bringing Tuscany to people's homes right now, as of course, it's

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

impossible to come here in person and to try to give them the wonder and the feeling that they are discovering something new and the emotions of opening a package. And it's like - you know I think we all need in these times a little bit of joy and that twist in the day to receive a box. And like "wow, so what's inside?" We, of course, describe what's inside, but let's say we also like the idea of, let's say, leave something with the imagination so that people then when they receive the box, they are still discovering something, you know? And so, of course, to have an idea of what they're getting but, let's say, mostly to experience that products once they are in their homes. And again, we are so glad the very first edition has been for Christmas. So to bring, let's say, the Christmas tradition to people's homes. And it has been a wonderful, wonderful adventure. We were not ready for that wonderful response we had. We were like, wow, I was not expecting it. And then I kept receiving messages from people thanking us and saying, you know, it was like having you both at home with us, you know, I was like 'wow!' So we decided to create new additions because we love that feeling. And so now of course now the next challenge and goal would be to export the and the whole joy behind spring. So we have created two boxes celebrating spring boxes. One is the Easter and Spring box - with all the beautiful products that we have been describing to you until now. So from the Pecorino to the asparagus, the artichokes, the Colomba cake, the edible flowers, the honey. So many wonderful products coming from the spring. And the other one will be this Wellness box, which is all about supporting the - it's something we created for celebrating the woman. And it is supporting of the artisans and the beautiful linens and the pottery. And these cosmetics made with the irises and the cashmere milk soaps and all these products. So 2 very special boxes. And it would be a beautiful way to bring a little bit of Tuscany into your homes.

[00:43:13.560] - Katy

Yes, I agree. And so if any of my family and friends are listening, this is exactly the kind of gift that I would like thank you. It's handmade, it's thoughtful and it's also a piece of Italy. They do sound absolutely gorgeous and I love - what I do love the most is actually they are helping keep the traditions alive in Chianti in a time of so much uncertainty. Oh, Arianna, how can people get access to these boxes if they want to have a little look and see exactly what's inside.

[00:43:43.170] - Arianna

So they can go to our website, which is [www.kmzerotours.com](http://www.kmzerotours.com). And then there's a whole section about the gift boxes that they can have a look and then they can choose the one they like the best and they can discover all the details. And we actually we have been working hard to finally create even an e-commerce and Katy you know how difficult it was to get all these technological knowledge as well. So let's say with something like one specific product, so now it's efficient so they can get it right there, or if they have something very special or unique in mind, they can, of course, write me an email at [Arianna@kmzerotours.com](mailto:Arianna@kmzerotours.com) and we can customize place for them.

[00:44:32.950] - Katy

Oh, lovely, and you're shipping all over the world, aren't you?

*Untold Italy travel podcast transcript. [Visit our website](#) for show notes and all episodes*

[00:44:36.100] - Arianna

Yeah, we ship all over the world. Yeah, mainly let's say mainly Europe and the US and Canada, but we can also ship in other countries. So you can drop us an e-mail and we'll give you advice.

[00:44:52.450] - Katy

Grazie Arianna for joining me again on Untold Italy. It is such a pleasure to be transported, if only for a little moment, to your perfect piece of paradise in Chianti and to hear about all the things that I'm going to buy in the near future. Thank you very much.

[00:45:07.240] - Arianna

Thank you Katy. And thanks to all of you for listening. And we hope you have appreciated and I hope to see you soon in person here. And until then, I hope you appreciate this little new project we have created.

[00:45:19.600] - Katy

Grazie Mille. Thank you.

[00:45:25.680] - Arianna

Grazie

[00:45:27.870] - Katy

Listeners I can tell you that some of the fondest memories I have from my own childhood are delicious meals shared around a beautifully dressed table, both of my grandmothers were avid collections of linen and also beautiful natural cosmetics. So I love that Arianna has found a way to bring these traditions to people around the world. If you'd like to learn more about these beautiful mementos of Tuscany, you can visit our show notes at [untolditaly.com/62](https://untolditaly.com/62).

[00:45:55.810] - Katy

We've also included a lovely video of Arianna showing Chianti in spring and doing a very cute unboxing of one of their gorgeous Spring gift boxes. If you're looking for a very special gift to celebrate Easter or for your mum for Mother's Day, I think they would be perfect. All the details about the boxes are up on our site, too. That's all we have for this week. Coming up next week, we're heading to a lesser known region. It's one from where many people emigrated at the end of the 19th century and has some fascinating traditions and stories I can't wait to share with you. Make sure you subscribe to our show on your favorite podcast app. So you are notified as soon as it is available. Until then, it's Ciao for now.